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GENERAL NOTES.

The Diameter of the Pupil of the Eye.—An interesting note on this point is given by Mr. W. H. Steavenson in the *Journal of the British Astronomical Association* for June, 1916:

> "Nearly every textbook dealing with the practical side of astronomy contains the familiar statement that the lowest power which can usefully be employed on any telescope is one of five to each inch of aperture. This statement is, of course, based on the assumption that the average diameter of the human pupil is one-fifth of an inch. It is impossible to find out how the adoption of this value originated, but it was presumably the outcome of an inquiry addressed by some astronomer to one of his physiological friends. If this was so, it is somewhat unfortunate that the physiologist omitted to mention that the value given was only a *daylight* average. As such it is, no doubt, very fairly correct, but it obviously has no useful application to the astronomical telescope, which is used almost entirely at night. The question which really concerns the astronomer is: what is the average diameter of the pupil under ordinary observing conditions, *i. e.,* in semi-darkness?"

Mr. Steavenson, to test out this time-honored tradition, adopted the ingenious plan of taking flashlight photographs of several persons in a darkened room, allowing about ten minutes in each case for the pupil of the eye to adapt itself to the semi-darkness. The average pupillary diameter for five subjects was found to be just over one-third of an inch. Statements in nearly every astronomical textbook will have to be changed as the result of these simple experiments.

This improved value has a direct bearing upon the value of the lowest magnifying power which can be employed with a telescope. The emergent pencil of rays from an eyepiece must have a smaller diameter than that of the pupil, otherwise the full aperture of the lens is not utilized. It would seem then that the lowest practicable power is about three to each inch of aperture, a point of considerable importance in observing very faint objects or in searching for comets.

In this connection it is of interest to note that the Reverend John Michell, in a paper in the *Philosophical Transactions* for 1767, makes the statement: "for the pupil of the eye is not less than a third of an inch in diameter, in a clear starlight night, when there is no moon." Whether this anticipation of Steavenson's results was the result of experiments or merely a lucky guess on Michell's part can not be determined, as only the bare statement is given.

A Remarkable Aurora.—On the evening of August 26 an aurora of phenomenal brilliancy and magnitude was seen over all southern Canada and in the northern States. Observations have been reported from places in Nova Scotia and British Columbia, three thousand miles apart. The display reached its greatest beauty in parts of Canada, where it is described as filling the entire visible hemisphere of the sky. It does not appear to have been seen in California; should any observers in this latitude have noticed the phenomenon, they are invited to send brief notes of the display to Dr. C. A. Chant, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF THE PACIFIC,

HELD IN THE ROOMS OF THE SOCIETY ON OCTOBER 7, 1916, AT 12:15 P. M.

This was a special meeting, called by the President because of the failure of the regular Board Meeting in August, when the Society went to San Diego, and having for its special purpose the consideration of certain plans to establish a lecture course and to increase the membership of the Society.

There were present: President S. D. Townley and Directors Campbell, Cushing, Curtis, Leuschner, Markwart, Hodghead and Richardson. By special invitation there were also present the following non-official members of the Society: Dr. R. G. Aitken, Mr. J. Costa, Professor Geo. C. Edwards, Dr. Sturla Einarsson, Mr. J. D. Galloway, Mr. B. A. Baird and Mr. F. R. Ziel.

The following were elected members of the Society:

Prince Rohani Thirunal Raja,
Assistant Director and Astronomer,
Royal Observatory, Trivundrum,
Travancore, India.

Martinus Nijhoff,
S. Gravenhage, Netherlands.

R. E. Vandruff,
San Diego, California.

Mrs. Marie Caul Cox,
El Centro, Imperial County, California.